

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

These remarks are submitted in response to the Office Action dated June 13, 2007 (Office Action). As this response is timely filed within the 3-month shortened statutory period, no fee is believed due. However, the Office is expressly authorized to charge any deficiencies and to credit any overpayments to Deposit Account No. 50-0951.

On the basis of new grounds of rejection, noted at page 4 of the Office Action, each of the claims was rejected. Specifically, Claims 1-33 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 7,003,546 to Cheah (hereinafter Cheah).

Amendments to the Claims

Although Applicants respectfully disagree with the rejections asserted in the Office Action, Applicants nonetheless have amended at least some of the claims in order to expedite prosecution by further emphasizing certain aspects of the claims. However, Applicants respectfully assert that any amendment and/or cancellation of claims in this response should not be interpreted as the surrender of any subject matter. Thus, Applicants are not conceding by these amendments that any previously submitted claims are not patentable over the references of record. Applicants' present claim amendments and cancellations are only submitted for purposes of facilitating expeditious prosecution of the present Application. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully reserve the right to pursue any previously submitted claims in one or more continuation and/or divisional patent applications.

In this response, Applicants have amended independent Claims 1, 7, 15, 16, 22, and 30 to further emphasize certain aspects of the Applicants' invention. In particular, Applicants have amended the independent claims to include the further limitation that the business attribute information identifies market segments for a business and customer and

business function associated with each of the market segments. Furthermore, the claims have been amended to include the further limitation that the step of determining whether a located business is a competitor is performed by market segment. Additionally, the claims have been amended to provide access to all information of the located business, except that information associated with market segments in which a located business is a competitor is restricted. Such amendments are fully supported throughout the Specification. (See, e.g., pg. 6, lines 1-29, and pg. 7, lines 1-5.) No new subject matter has been added.

Aspects of the Claims

Prior to discussing the cited reference, it may be useful to discuss certain aspects of the claims. The claims, as typified by Claim 1, recite systems and method for connecting businesses and facilitating the establishment of business relationships. The method, as recited in Claim 1, can include the step of creating an online registry of businesses. For each of the businesses in the online registry, the business attributes can be stored. The business attributes can include an identification of market segments in which the business is involved. Furthermore, the business attributes can also include the business functions which the business performs for each particular market segment. In some embodiments, the business attribute information can also include customer lists for particular market segments.

The method, as recited in Claim 1, also can include the further step of identifying or locating one or more businesses in the registry having business attributes matching a query performed by an inquiring business. The method can further include, as recited in Claim 1, the step of determining whether the located businesses are competitors to the inquiring business in the various market segments. Such a determination can be made based on the comparison of business functions in each market segment, and in some

cases, also can be based on comparisons of customer lists. For example, if company A and company B perform the same function in the same market segment, they can be determined to be competitors. However, if the business functions are different, even in the same market segment, for company A and company B, then the companies can be determined to not be competitors.

Finally, the method, as recited in Claim 1, further can include the step of providing an inquiring business access to at least a portion of the business attributes for the located business. The portion is determined based on the determination of whether or not the businesses are competitors. That is, access to parts of the business attribute information for the various market segments can be restricted, where the information related to competing areas of business. Therefore a competing business can have still have access to other information related to non-competing areas of business. Subsequently, a communications link can be provided between the inquiring company and the located business.

The Claims Define Over the Cited Reference

As previously noted, independent Claims 1, 7, 15, 16, 22, and 30 were rejected as being unpatentable over Cheah. Cheah discloses a system and method for controlled distribution of contact information over a network. Applicants respectfully disagree and submit that the independent claims, as amended, define over Cheah.

First, Cheah fails to disclose the step of providing access to any type of business attribute information other than business contact information. As defined in Cheah, contact information includes information for identifying or contacting a user, such as a telephone number, address, fax number, email, and /or website. As an example of the information to be exchanged, Cheah discloses providing such information in the form of a business card. (See, e.g., Col. 6, lines 22-49, Col. 16, lines 53-61.) While this can be

considered one definition of business attribute information, it does not disclose the business attribute information recited in the claims and as defined in the Specification. Business attribute information, as recited in the claims, includes market segment information, business function information, and/or customer list information. (See, also Specification, page 6, lines 16-24.) Nowhere does Cheah disclose that such information can include this type of information.

Furthermore, Cheah does not suggest providing such information, as Cheah is directed to exchanging contact information only. In contrast, the claims recite the limitation that the business attribute information includes market segments the company occupies and the business functions it performs in such segments. Furthermore, in some embodiments, customer lists associated with the various segments can also be included in the business attribute information. Such a configuration is advantageous over that of Cheah, as it allows businesses to uncover potential business partners based on the characteristics of their business, not just using the traditional contact methods after obtaining contact information.

Second, Cheah fails to disclose a step for determining whether businesses are competitors of any kind in a particular market segment. In the Office Action, it is acknowledged that Cheah fails to disclose the steps of determining whether businesses are competitors and restricting access to business attributes if the businesses are competitors. However, it is stated at page 2 of the Office Action that "Cheah does...teach only allowing "consenting users" to be able to view each other's data (fig 4, 404), therefore, it would have been obvious to allow companies to deny a competitor access to their customer's information so as not allow a business to gather a competitor's customers." Even if preventing a competitor from gaining access to a customer list could be considered obvious, how to make the initial determination that another business is a competitor is not. Referring to FIG. 4 of Cheah, the step relied on in the Office Action

requires that a user consent to the distribution of his contact information. That is, the user must affirmatively determine whether inquiring party should receive the information. However, nowhere does Cheah teach the comparison of profile information to determine whether to exchange information. Furthermore, because the method of Cheah still requires affirmative user action to exchange information, Applicants further submit that Cheah teaches away from methods in which the determination of whether business are competitors is automated. In contrast, the claims recite the limitation that in response to the inquiry, the determination of whether two business are competitors and whether they can exchange information does not require user input or "consent." Rather, the method and system compare the business attribute information and, independently of either business, determine whether they are competitors and whether at least a portion of the attribute information needs to be restricted. Such a configuration is advantageous as it automates the process of making contacts between businesses by automatically determine the type of information that would be appropriate to exchange and to protect important business information.

Accordingly, Cheah, alone or in combination with any other reference of record, fails to disclose, suggest, or render obvious each and every element of the independent claims, as amended. Applicants therefore respectfully submit that the independent claims, as amended, now define over all references of record. Furthermore, as the remaining claims each depend from one of the independent claims while reciting additional limitation, Applicants respectfully submit that the dependent claims now also define over the references of record.

CONCLUSION

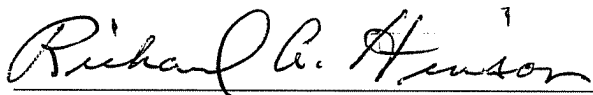
Applicants believe that this application is now in full condition for allowance, which action is respectfully requested. The Applicants request that the Examiner call the

U.S. Patent Appln. No. 10/081,702
Amendment Dated September 13, 2007
Reply to Office Action of June 13, 2007
Docket No. BOC9-2001-0025 (271)

undersigned if clarification is needed on any matter within this Amendment, or if the Examiner believes a telephone interview would expedite the prosecution of the subject application to completion.

Respectfully submitted,

Date: September 13, 2007



Gregory A. Nelson, Registration No. 30,577
Richard A. Hinson, Registration No. 47,652
Eduardo J. Quiñones, Registration No. 58,575
AKERMAN SENTERFITT
Customer No. 40987
Post Office Box 3188
West Palm Beach, FL 33402-3188
Telephone: (561) 653-5000